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## AFTER SIGMA XI—THEN WHAT?

BY EUGENE VAN CLEEF

The world never needed the services of scientific men and the scientific ideal more than it does today. It needs scientific men for the accomplishment of systematic organization and constructive development of our industries, our arts, our music, and all the other elements that affect modern progress. The world needs an ideal lest we become too material and only mercenary in our motives. While this is the day of the specialist, there is danger ahead if he fails to keep before him an ever widening horizon of thought and endeavor. Men may become so absorbed by their own little world that they will develop along lines of individualism rather than of cooperation for the good of all. Sigma Xi is the only scientific organization which does not exclude any branch of science. As such, it offers the members great possibilities for constructive work and for the making of a world better to live in for the coming generation.

In his presidential address (June 15, 1887) Professor H. S. Williams of Cornell, first President of Cornell Chapter of Sigma Xi, one of the founders of Sigma Xi, expressed forcibly and beautifully the worth-while ideals for which Sigma Xi stands. He said in part,\* "The spirit of scholarship demands modern learning. The modern scholar seeks knowledge as a means toward the vigorous expression of his manhood, a knowledge of those seething elements in the midst of which he lives, and of which he is one. . . . He must be a specialist. In his specialty he must think for himself, plan for himself, act for himself. Here he must rest on no one, but be himself a support for others. He must be a constant student, constantly advancing, and, making stepping stones of his dead self, rise to higher things. . . . He who adapts himself best to modern issues, who serves best the present ages, has been, will always be the successful man."

Professor Williams, one can readily appreciate, possessed vision and a keen appreciation of the ideals of life as well as the spirit of practical accomplishment—qualities not too common even among the leaders of this day.

The motto of the society of Sigma Xi is officially recorded as "Companions in Zealous Research." For its interpretation we refer to Professor Williams' statement cited above, of the hopes and

\*QUARTER CENTURY RECORD AND HISTORY of Sigma Xi—by H. B. Ward.

ideals of the first members of Sigma Xi which should also represent the goal sought by the present day members. The spirit of research has always been fostered, and of course has constituted the keystone of its development. Election to membership in Sigma Xi has been based upon a demonstrated ability of students of science to accomplish successful research. Some institutions recognize this in the undergraduate years while other institutions recognize it only in graduate years and elect accordingly. It should be noted that election is based largely upon a forecast—there is no assurance that a student elected to Sigma Xi will do honor to his fellow members although as matters have worked out, there have been few instances where the judgments of the departmental heads have caused them to regret their action.

Sigma Xi has not been ideally impractical. It has fostered a sympathetic bond between the theoretical or academic consideration of scientific problems and practical research to solve some of the problems immediately associated with public welfare. We need only refer to the splendid work of the California Chapter in connection with the Bubonic Plague. It published a volume on the subject of the eradication of bubonic plague which has earned international notice. There are thousands of instances where individual members of Sigma Xi have accomplished practical scientific work of the highest order. Sigma Xi sees both sides of the shield, the ideal and the practical, and hence possesses the basic elements for the building of a great and beneficial association.

An organization is no stronger than its weakest link. Sigma Xi unfortunately possesses a weak link, in the opinion of the writer, but it is a link which it is possible to forge into one of its strongest. The weak link is the change in character of membership when one passes from the "active" membership within the walls of the university to the "inactive" membership when he leaves the university. In its practical workings, this arrangement results in the inactive members becoming essentially non-members. They lose interest in the organization to which they were elected and are reminded of it only as they may carry a key which stands as the emblem of the society. The SIGMA XI QUARTERLY, in which this article appears, can serve as a medium between the active and inactive membership. It aims to stimulate interest in the welfare of Sigma Xi. Unfortunately the struggle for existence has been severe, and

today it is published at less than cost. This condition ought not to obtain. The present subscription rate of 50 cents per year, of course, could hardly be expected to support the *QUARTERLY*. This could well be doubled and the number of subscriptions increased several times. It is inconceivable that inactive members should be indifferent. That there is a real interest in Sigma Xi has been demonstrated in at least one community.

In Duluth, Minn., a city of approximately 100,000 people, were brought together about seven years ago the members of Sigma Xi present there. They represented different lines of business and the professions. Meetings have been held once a month at which members dine and some one of the group presents a paper on a phase of the field of work in which he is engaged at the time. The wives of the married members and lady friends of unmarried members are invited to the meetings. Every one of the meetings has proved an inspiration and despite the fact that the membership was sadly depleted by the war and at the present time is only five in number, the Sigma Xi Club still exists. Meetings are now not held so frequently, but nevertheless the organization is intact and is prospering. If this can be done in a city of 100,000 people, it can be accomplished in many other centers throughout the country. A number of the members of the Duluth Club of Sigma Xi had never known of the *QUARTERLY* and also were not aware of the presence in Duluth of other members of Sigma Xi who came from various universities throughout the country. A local organization of the type such as organized there stimulated greater interest in Sigma Xi and it is the writer's opinion each one of the members of that organization would be very glad to subscribe to the *QUARTERLY* if they knew that there would result a greater spirit of cooperation and good fellowship among the inactive members throughout the country. The SIGMA XI *QUARTERLY* may well serve as the tie that binds the inactive membership and the active membership; on the one hand it may bring good tidings of the active members to the inactive members and on the other what is going on among those who have left the universities and are out in the wide, wide world may be communicated to those still in training.

In order to stimulate Sigma Xi still further, it is suggested that in cities where chapters are located there be greater cooperation between the active chapter and the inactive members. There might

be an arrangement whereby the inactive members would meet with the active once a year, if not twice a year, for example—a mid-winter and a mid-summer meeting, at which there would be exchanges of ideas. The result would be mutually beneficial. Members in the business world would be stimulated by the ideals set forth by those still in the academic field, and those in the academic work preparing for their future, would get inspiration from contact with the inactive members, now successful business and professional men.

There is no limit to the possibilities of Sigma Xi. Let it not be a dormant organization but rather one wholly alert to the world about.

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#### NOTE

April 15, 1920.

I was interested in your account of the "First Convention" in the *QUARTERLY*. The mystery of the Kansas delegates is explained by the fact that the Kansas Chapter sent formal credentials to Comstock and Merritt of the Alpha Chapter to represent Kansas at the Convention, in accordance with a provision of the Constitution of the Society.

JAMES McMAHON